
Russian Jacobins

The generation of which Herzen was a part has been the final manifestation of the liberalizing nobility. His doctrinaire radicalism was a flower of the conservatory, which grew and blossomed in an artificial atmosphere which gave it life but which withered when it was first exposed to the free air and real atmosphere of practical action. The men of that generation criticized, mocked the actual social order with the caustic skill fashionable in the salons and in a dated poetic language. This critique became an occupation for them. They were content with their role.

—Sergei Nechaev, *Obshchina*

The Russian radicalism of the early 1860s was supported by a messianic social optimism that had been building since the death of Nicholas I, two components of which were particularly important in keeping the “movement” going. One was the support of a significant part of educated public opinion, of *obshchestvo*. The other was progressive *obshchestvo*’s belief that the Russian peasantry constituted a revolutionary force that would at some point rise up and sweep the old order away, and whose social institutions would provide the foundation for a new, free, and humane society in Russia.

But by 1863, as we have seen, the situation had altered considerably. “Liberal” support had largely evaporated; progressive

public opinion was exhausted by years of social turmoil, terrified by the fires of 1862, and roused to patriotic ire by the Polish rebellion. It was clear that no significant portion of the gentry was going to press hard for a constitution. And although belief in the institutions of the peasantry as the basis for a socialist (or merely democratic) future remained, the peasants were obviously not going to explode into revolt right away. For the next few years, the most militant of the Russian radicals were thrown back on themselves.

Until 1862, potential divisions within the Left had been to some extent held in check by the movement of events themselves and the optimism they generated. Now, as public opinion moved to the right, Russian radicalism began to fragment. Several of the younger veterans, now living the squalid existence of political émigrés, launched a fierce attack on Herzen, whom—in their isolation and despair—they came to regard as a despicable relic of the old order, living in London or Geneva like a lord, amid the ruin of their hopes. In the words of Isaiah Berlin, the younger radicals thought of Herzen as

a self-indulgent sceptic, too rich, too civilized, too elegant, too much a gentleman, too comfortably established in the West to sympathize with the harsh realities of the Russian situation, and dangerous, too, because prone to sound a note of disillusion, even of cynicism, and so to weaken the sinews of the revolution—liable to become ironical and, worse still, entertaining, at a time when serious men must decide to commit themselves to one side or the other without so much fastidious regard to their private consciences and scruples.¹

One can see the split foreshadowed in the younger generation's veneration of Chernyshevsky and their growing aversion to Herzen's style, if not his ideas, by 1860. But the violent and open breach took place only in the demoralized atmosphere that followed the Polish revolt and the arrest and condemnation of Chernyshevsky.

Nor was the younger generation's hostility to Herzen the only instance of dissension on the Left. In 1864–65, a fairly serious dispute erupted between the only journals in Russia that were

still vehicles for radical opinion: the *Contemporary*, which had been allowed to resume publication after eight months, and Dmitry Pisarev's *Russian Word*.² The essence of the dispute lay in the *Contemporary*'s fidelity to a broadly Populist position, while Pisarev stressed the importance of a well-educated, scientifically oriented, reforming elite. Only a dedicated and self-conscious leadership could get on with the serious business of liberating the masses from the eternal cycle of misery and deprivation from which they had suffered so long. Pisarev had little belief in "popular wisdom" and—in the discouraging atmosphere of the mid-1860s—he became irritably impatient with those who still believed that the peasants might be a revolutionary force or even bring about their own liberation. He was a strong advocate of industrialization and the spread of scientific ideas; he thought the notion that the survival of the peasant commune might provide Russia with a "separate path" to socialism and modernity was simply ridiculous.

On the other side, the mood at the *Contemporary*, bereft of the leadership of Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov, was bitter and weary. Saltykov-Shchedrin, the satirical writer, attacked "turncoat nihilists" and revealed a new pessimism about that younger generation in whom all progressives had so recently seen the salvation of Russia. Furthermore, M. A. Antonovich and other *Contemporary* editors produced a string of Populist articles that contained a semimystical strain of peasant-worship, more akin to the writings of Shchapov or Herzen at his most rhapsodic than to the more realistic and economically sophisticated views of Chernyshevsky. Disunity on the Left could scarcely have been more complete.*

Except for some few of Pisarev's followers, the young radicals who became politically conscious between 1862 and 1866 entertained very little hope for reform. Thus the kind of violent, bloody, and total revolution envisaged in *Young Russia* began to

*To an extent, the physical contraction of the Left may be seen in the circulation figures for the *Contemporary*; in 1862, there had been seven thousand subscribers, but by the end of 1864 there were only about four thousand. See M. Lemke, *Epokha tsenzurnykh reform* (St. Petersburg, 1904), p. 192n.

seem less "extreme": was this not the only way that Russia could be renewed? Most young radicals stubbornly refused to give up the idea of reaching the people, but clearly the process would be protracted and full of danger, and would demand a lengthy commitment to hard and frustrating work. In the face of this situation, it was natural for intelligentsia radicals to believe that they would have to do more to bring about the revolution, both by raising the consciousness of the peasantry and—some came to feel—by actually setting an insurrection in motion and guiding it, through conspiratorial means.

In the increasingly nerve-wracking, underground, and conspiratorial existence into which they had moved by 1865, Russian radicals were keenly aware of their isolation. They felt the unreliability of those around them—sometimes even that of their own comrades. Leaders began not only to keep a keen eye on possible weakness or deviation among their followers, but to resort to deliberate deceptions to convince their comrades that—despite appearances—they were part of a powerful nationwide (or even Europe-wide) movement. The naive consciousness of a liberating mission was replaced by the belief in the necessity for secret organizations, designed not only to continue the struggle against the government but to ensure that the faithful remained committed.

This sort of development was by no means unique to the Russian radicalism of the 1860s. It was to be found in the secret societies of Restoration Europe (1815–30); more recently, we have seen how the extreme Left in America in the 1970s has gone underground and resorted both to terrorism and to revolutionary fantasy in the effort to keep the "movement" alive in the face of public apathy or hostility.*

Between about 1863 and 1871, Russian radicals lacked a serious,

*Isolated acts of terror—assassinations, bank robberies, or kidnappings—such as those engaged in by small groups like the Symbionese Liberation Army advertise the lack of a real program or constituency. The fantasies of the National Caucus of Labor Committees reveal a desperate need to hold their membership together, through subjection to a charismatic leader, by means of intense pressure on the membership to believe in a worldwide conspiracy headed by the Rockefeller family—and by force, if necessary. On the emergence of the National Caucus, see *The New York Times*, Jan. 20, 1974, pp. 1, 51, and the *Boston Phoenix*, Jan. 29, 1974, p. 3 *et seq.*

ongoing, and organized contact with a constituency. They felt, of course, that the *narod* was their constituency, but most of them were sooner or later brought to recognize that they were not yet recognized as the people's spokesmen by anyone but themselves—and a few nervous functionaries in the political police. They could not yet speak the language of the people, nor could they really lead it—although many hoped at least to channel its rage into a revolutionary and socialist direction. The government remained committed to reform (however it might be mingled with repression), but with the erosion of the mood of reforming optimism that had characterized the preceding years, recruitment was often (though not always) more difficult. Furthermore, the world into which one went, when one became a radical, was now a distinctly subversive one—which, of course, had attractions of its own. But one could no longer dream, as even Herzen had, of heading some kind of reform ministry. Although there are a few striking exceptions—people for whom 1860s radicalism was wild oats, later forgiven—the only reasonable supposition for incipient radicals was that the task at hand was to subvert or overthrow the government from outside. The “we-they” attitude had become total.

Russian universities and other institutions of higher learning—particularly in the capitals—had become the principal loci for radical recruitment. But in general the large mass of the student body was less amenable to radical ideas than it had been; correspondingly, the hostility between committed radicals and “liberals” or moderates grew stronger.

The social composition of radical groups also changed. The majority of the most active and engaged seems still to have been drawn from the gentry. But more and more of them were from the provinces, from outlying parts of the empire. And there was a growing mix of *raznochintsy*: the sons of priests and lower officials, the children of army officers from the lower ranks—and even an occasional representative of a merchant family or a peasant. And last, but certainly not least, one finds a small but active group of women taking part in the revolutionary struggle, in a number of cases leading it. By the end of the 1860s, the

radicals had come to regard the outside world as more and more hostile and less amenable to anything but violent and cataclysmic action. And that violence was increasingly turned on the membership itself.

A convenient place to begin our discussion of this period is the year 1863 and the publication of Chernyshevsky's novel, *What Is To Be Done?* Seldom has a book had so immediate (and indeed so protracted) an effect upon the audience for which it was intended. One is forced to turn to the most threadbare cliché: the novel was in fact the Bible of Russian radicals for many years, although its impact was most powerful on its first generation of readers. And indeed there can have been few Russian Christians of the nineteenth century who read the Bible and attempted to live the Sermon on the Mount with the passion and commitment with which Chernyshevsky's young disciples attempted to live out his communal prescriptions.

Considered formally, as a work of fiction, *What Is To Be Done?* is maladroit and in places laughable, but that has never mattered to its readers. Chernyshevsky himself said—for our purposes—all that need be said, remarking in the preface that "I don't have the shadow of an artistic talent. I even use the language badly. But that's not important."³ Chernyshevsky is not going to give the reader poetry but, he soon confesses, truth.

The importance of the novel lies in Chernyshevsky's portrait of the men and women who were trying to build a new society—and the power that portrait had for Russian radicals from the mid-1860s into the 1890s, and even beyond. Georgy Plekhanov, the "founder" of Russian Marxism and a man of a later generation, wrote in a frequently quoted passage that "we have all drawn [from the novel] moral strength and faith in a better future"; at the very end of the nineteenth century he concluded that "from the moment when the printing press was introduced in Russia until now no printed work has had such a success as *What Is To Be Done?*"⁴

In 1905, the anarchist Prince Peter Kropotkin wrote of the novel that "for the Russian youth of the time it was a revelation [*sic*], and it became a programme. . . . No novel of Turgueneff

and no writings of Tolstoy or any other writer have ever had such a wide and deep influence upon Russian society. . . . It became a watchword of Young Russia, and the influence of the ideas it propagated has never ceased to be apparent since.”⁵

Kropotkin was not the only Russian radical who referred to *What Is To Be Done?* in scriptural terms. Pëtr Tkachëv, one of the principal shapers of Russian Jacobinism between 1865 and 1875, referred to the book as the “gospel” of Russian radicalism;⁶ and Nikolai Ishutin, an archetypal 1860s radical with whom we will be concerned later in this chapter, is supposed to have recognized only three great men in history: Jesus Christ, St. Paul, and Chernyshevsky. Even so unsympathetic an observer as the novelist Vladimir Nabokov, who treated Chernyshevsky as a peculiar joke on Russian culture, admitted that the novel was read “the way liturgical books are read.”⁷

What Is To Be Done? performed several essential services for young radicals of the 1860s. It gave them a rough sketch of a program—the creation of artels and other communal institutions—at a time when the euphoria of the pre-reform period was gone and the prospect of peasant revolution was becoming more remote. Timing is important here; the novel appeared serially in the *Contemporary* in 1863, just as the expectations of Land and Liberty were being dashed and the organization, such as it was, had collapsed. Chernyshevsky was already achieving the status of a martyr; the poet Nekrasov had compared him to Christ crucified. Never did the inveterately inefficient Russian censorship make a greater mistake than by allowing *What Is To Be Done?* to appear, first in the pages of the *Contemporary*, then (incredibly) in book form.

Secondly, the novel provided what in today’s academia would be called “role models” for an incipient movement that as yet had none. It was subtitled “Tales About New People”; in Rakhmetov, Vera Pavlovna, Lopukhov, and Kirsanov, Chernyshevsky produced not abstract formulas but pictures of how people should live and what they should do. The new people are rational (almost insanely so), militant, and at war with the existing order—which is scarcely described at all, except when

“bad” characters soliloquize about how the corrupt environment made them the pathetic villains they are. At the same time, as soon as the “good” people understand how socialist ideas can transform the world, they are possessed by a heroic resolution that always sees them through; they are never defeated by moral complexity or force of circumstances. Nor is there any difficulty in communication between *obshchestvo* and *narod*; for the “new people” (and for you, dear reader, says Chernyshevsky), starting a cooperative or reforming a prostitute is easy, if only you *will!*

Lopukhov pushes upper-class men off the sidewalk, instead of deferring to them, but Rakhmetov, the most explicitly revolutionary, exemplifies the need for strength and toughness in the service of the *narod*. He eats raw beef and sleeps on a bed of nails; he gets to know the people by traveling all over Russia on foot, serving as a barge hauler and a laborer; his extraordinary strength is celebrated by the people in epic terms, and so on. This physical prowess, which Chernyshevsky himself so strikingly lacked, is controlled and directed by Rakhmetov’s complex, elaborate, and rigid system of rules for life. For example, he will eat only what the *narod* eats (except for the essential raw beef), which leads him always to refuse apricots and sardines and to eat oranges only in St. Petersburg. In the provinces, oranges are found only on the tables of the privileged.

However lifeless and caricatured these figures may seem to most twentieth-century readers, they supplied what Che Guevara was to provide for a more recent generation of student radicals: a fusion of ideals, program, and style. In the words of Lenin, a great admirer of the novel: “Chernyshevsky not only showed that every right-thinking and really honest man must be a revolutionary, but he also showed—and this is his greatest merit—what a revolutionary must be like, what his principles must be, how he must approach his aim, and what methods he must use to achieve it.”⁸ Finally, Chernyshevsky’s portraits of women and his description of the sexual equality that the “new people” were trying to achieve had a particular impact on the generation of the 1860s. Although Chernyshevsky’s female characters are as

wooden as his males, they raise vital issues intelligently: the need for a room of one's own, the need for a job outside the home. In the history of the emancipation of women in Russia, Chernyshevsky and his novel have a special place.

It soon became clear that Chernyshevsky, in his life and in the pages of his novel, had begun the creation of a radical identity. The Manichaeism, the exultation of will, the whole-souled, puritanical (and rhetorical) repudiation of "possession," in human relationships particularly—all these renewed the courage of young radicals in the 1860s. And although the heroines and heroes are intellectually anti-Romantic (they are "rational egoists" and materialists), there is a sentimental high-mindedness about their personal relations that appealed to a broad segment of Russia's youth. But above all, Chernyshevsky's "new people" made the society of the future imaginable, and therefore possible. Neither Herzen, with his cult of the Decembrist rebels, nor Turgenev, with his magnificent, ambiguous portrait of Bazarov in *Fathers and Children*,⁹ had been able to achieve anything comparable. With the appearance of Chernyshevsky's novel and the development of his personal cult, young opponents of the established order in Russia had at least a rudimentary sense of a way of life, a culture, a set of convictions upon which they could base their challenge to the ancien régime. As they did so, they were able to distinguish themselves from "liberals" and radicals of Herzen's generation more sharply; hostility to their forebears became, for a time, part of their sense of themselves.

Judging by the memoir literature and other eyewitness testimony, it was much less clear in the late 1850s and early 1860s what a "radical identity" might be. The lines between political positions were quite fluid. In a way that is not easy to describe, one *became* a radical in the mid-1860s and began to develop a quasi-tribal relationship to other radicals. Becoming a radical tended to be a more total experience; at some point it involved a conscious repudiation of the existing order. It was more like a religious conversion. And following the break, the new recruit could find a self-conscious grouping of people, with ideals imbedded in

a way of life, to receive him or her. In other words, there was now an embryonic radical community, developing most obviously where there were large numbers of students.

Both because of the development of a radical identity and because of the hazardous nature of radicalism after 1862–63, one suspects that the younger generation of radicals was made up increasingly of people who had, from early on, defined themselves, or been defined, as “outsiders.” Let us now turn to the most important radical grouping of the mid-1860s and examine their ethos and activities in some detail.

The most important of these “Jacobin”^{*} groups came into existence toward the middle of the decade; after it had crystallized, it became known, appropriately, as Organization (*Organizatsiia*), and the principal figure in it was Nikolai Ishutin.

There is very little information, unfortunately, on Ishutin’s early life.¹⁰ We know that he was born in 1840 in a town on the Volga near Saratov; his father was a prosperous merchant, and his mother was from a gentry family. He lost both parents when he was only two years old, however, and was brought up by the Karakozov family, relatives of his father. Dmitry Karakozov, whose attempt on the life of the Emperor was to lead to the destruction of Ishutin’s group, was his cousin. After a childhood marred by periodic ill health, he arrived at the University of Moscow in the fall of 1863 to be an auditor. Even before Ishutin left Penza, where he had attended the gymnasium, he had been at least marginally involved in radical activity, distributing pamphlets in the countryside. Although their precise content is not attested, the presumption is that they were the work of Land

^{*}The term “Jacobin,” of course, derives from the French Revolution. In the Russian context, it was generally employed to designate those who did not believe that the *narod*, left to its own devices, would be able to make the revolution, that the radical intelligentsia would have to take a more or less leading role. Very few of the “Jacobins” of the 1860s denied the *narod* an important role, both in the destruction of the old order and—through popular communal spirit and institutions—in the creation of the new. But as the decade wore on, many intellectuals came to believe that the people’s primitive socialist consciousness would have to be developed by nonpeasant radicals and that the people would need intelligentsia leadership in organizing the postrevolutionary society. In an extreme form, then, Russian Jacobinism could be seen as genuinely analogous to French Jacobinism, with a Russian “Committee of Public Safety” making the revolution by decree from above.

and Liberty.¹¹ Ishutin appears to have had considerable attractive force, although he was “neither eloquent nor learned” and was sometimes described as a hunchback.

The beginnings of the group that gathered around Ishutin emerges rather mistily from student politics and the life of the Moscow University community in the early 1860s. We know that the students from Penza and several other Volga provinces had organized into a so-called *zemliachestvo*, an informal social grouping with a regional base, with certain fraternal and corporative functions.¹² Although the *zemliachestvo* was in no way a political organization, it contained a number of students who were prepared to be—or who already were—politically involved. The treasurer, from early on, was D. A. Iurasov, subsequently one of the prime movers in Organization.

More directly, in the words of the eminent Soviet authority E. S. Vilenskaia, “the core of Ishutin’s circle consisted of natives of Penza province, who finished the gymnasium or the gentry institute in Penza at the end of the ’fifties or in the early ’sixties.”¹³ Dmitry Ivanov, another member of Ishutin’s circle, recalled the atmosphere at the Penza gymnasium in the early 1860s; despite the schematic and somewhat telegraphic quality of his remarks, they reveal that some of the intellectual currents that had been confined to Moscow, St. Petersburg, and the other university centers in the latter 1850s were reaching the provinces:

Just then . . . a kind of new spirit began to be felt. The traditions of Belinsky (who was from Penza), *Fathers and Children*, Leo Tolstoy, Dobroliubov, Nekrasov, Shchedrin, Buckle, Lewes,* *Rotting Swamps*, *Who Is To Blame?*,† *What Is To Be Done?*, J. S. Mill, the liberation of the peasants, the end of state monopolies, the beginning of the Polish uprising, the introduction of the natural sciences into gymnasium courses, new history textbooks, new relations between teachers and students, daring disputes with them in class . . . the whole atmosphere of school and life caught up [our] youth and sud-

*George Henry Lewes (1817–78), positivist literary critic and popularizer of the ideas of Auguste Comte. Lewes also wrote several novels and was celebrated for his liaison with George Eliot.

†*Who Is To Blame?*, a novel by Herzen, written and published in 1846.

denly, after the birch rod, the box on the ears and the scolding, after Ustrialov's scholasticism, they began to think, to read, to take up "questions," to argue about ideals, to live boldly, freely, independently.¹⁴

Several progressive teachers in the Penza gymnasium presumably helped the students find reading of the kind Ivanov mentioned; Ishutin lived with one of them for a while, and the teacher helped keep his former students in touch with one another.

A number of the future members of Ishutin's group had some involvement in the university disorders of 1861. M. N. Zagibalov was expelled from the University of Moscow; Iurasov refused to accept his *matrikul* and left voluntarily. V. N. Shaganov was involved but was let off with a reprimand. Pavel Fedoseev was close to Zaichnevsky and was thus familiar with the way of thinking that had produced *Young Russia*. And there were others with vague radical associations.

By September 1863, a Moscow circle that may legitimately be called Ishutin's was meeting for discussions. The nucleus was provided by veterans of the Penza gymnasium, almost all of gentry origin. Land and Liberty was still living a shadowy existence, and among the questions discussed was whether the group should "join" it. A preliminary decision that they should was apparently taken, but it is not clear whether any real action resulted.

Informal contacts with other radicals, several of them Poles, were undertaken right from the start. But whatever fleeting relations members of Ishutin's circle may have had with members of Land and Liberty and such veteran radicals as V. I. Kel'siev should not obscure the differences they rightly perceived in the situation of the radical Left in Russia at that time. Ishutin and his friends were—at least initially—under no illusion that there would be a revolution in Russia in the immediate future; they had lost the faith that underlay the activities of Land and Liberty and that had animated the pamphleteers of the so-called era of proclamations. In the fall of 1863, they were groping for a pro-

gram that would sustain them over a fairly long haul. At first, agitation and propaganda, primarily within the university community, were the order of the day. Then they moved to put Chernyshevsky's program into practice, setting up a variety of cooperative institutions that would both heighten consciousness among people like themselves and begin the formidable task of educating the *narod* to its destiny. The task was wearisome and demanded a staying power that was to prove difficult for Ishutin and his friends.

The mentality of Ishutin's circle is important and is quite distinct from that of any group that preceded it. Franco Venturi observed that "the desire for self-sacrifice was in fact the dominating idea of the group" and noted the spirit of asceticism that animated the hard core.¹⁵ There was almost no interest in education—let alone "culture"—except as a means toward an eventual revolution. The wealthier members—which meant in part those who would one day come into large estates and substantial sums of money—all pledged to donate their resources to "the cause." The natural desire to find material means for their projects and the self-sacrifice that the wealthier members displayed were to take on some rather grotesque forms—at any rate, within the more naive nineteenth-century context with which we are dealing.

In characteristically Russian fashion, the asceticism of the group did not preclude the use of alcohol, and up to a point the group seems to have lived a bohemian life-style, not strikingly different from that of the more emancipated university students of the day. But their detestation of and isolation from the existing order, which grew steadily between 1863 and 1865, clearly demarcated them from other fringe members of the university community. At the same time, there were other groups and individuals, in both Moscow and St. Petersburg, who shared their aspirations and their general mental set. Vilenskaia calls the sum of these groups, who had informal contacts with each other, an "underground," but the term is premature. Most of them still had jobs, or student status, or other connections with the institutions of Russian soci-

ety. Ishutin himself functioned periodically as a tutor in various subjects. The hard core of his group were roughly of an age—in their early or mid-twenties.

Contacts between what we might call the “new people,” after Chernyshevsky, were informal and irregular. But there were pockets of organization, like Ishutin’s circle, and the small numbers of really committed “new people” (mostly living a bohemian life around universities if they were not in hiding or exile abroad) felt a growing need for it.

Under such conditions, it is not surprising that members of Ishutin’s circle became, in 1864 and 1865, more attracted toward violence. We do not find among his friends that fascination with broad political, social, and even metaphysical issues that has characterized the Russian intelligentsia in so many stages of its existence; discussion of such matters provoked a certain impatience, if it was not regarded as diversionary froth. But Ishutin did like to pose one issue for discussion, both within his circle and when sympathetic outsiders—potential recruits—were present: Does the end justify the means? Ishutin was convinced from early on that it did. Another straw in the wind was a song that was popular among Ishutin and his friends. A kind of parody folk song, it ran as follows:

The smith’s just come from the forge,
Glory Hallelujah!

And the smith has forged three swords,
Glory Hallelujah!

The first sword’s for the boyar aristocrat,
Glory Hallelujah!

And the second sword’s for the hypocrite priest,
Glory Hallelujah!

And—with a prayer—the third sword’s for the tsar,
Glory Hallelujah!¹⁶

After a winter of discussion and just getting in touch with people in Moscow, the membership dispersed into the countryside and

to various provincial centers in the summer of 1864. They hoped for a number of things: to locate individuals and groups who shared their general view of things and could be, in an informal way, recruited; to find money to support propaganda; to establish cooperative organizations; and to engage in a bit of direct agitation among the peasants. Pëtr Ermolov,* the richest of several members who were well off, started a free school for peasants on his family estate; it was soon closed down by the local authorities for purveying ideas hostile to the Orthodox Church.¹⁷ This was the first of a number of free schools that the *Ishutintsy* were to undertake. Ishutin himself got a job on a Volga River steamboat, doubtless emulating Rakhmetov in *What Is To Be Done?*, who had worked as a barge hauler; from this mobile base he attempted to distribute propaganda among the peasantry, apparently without any great success.

When the group reassembled in Moscow in the fall of 1864, they had plenty of contacts but nothing that could be called a serious organization. They constituted a "circle" in the classic Russian sense: a group of close friends with grand intellectual or political aspirations. Many of the members knew other individuals and a few "groups" who shared their general orientation and hopes. That was all. They got involved, that autumn, in a number of cooperative ventures clearly inspired by *What Is To Be Done?*, while making firmer contact with others who were trying to do the same thing. Many of these ventures, with whom one or another member of the group had some connection, were originally quite unconnected to Ishutin. An enterprise like P. A. Spiridov's commune of female typesetters, for instance, arose independently of the *Ishutintsy*, but various members of the group, including Ishutin, used to hang out there. Repeated efforts were made to draw the women more deeply into Ishutin's political projects, with no success. Several were explicit about their mistrust of the *Ishutintsy* and their fear of being used. Although direct evidence about Ishutin's attitude toward women is lacking, it is interesting that there were no women in lead-

*Ermolov, orphaned at an early age, had full control of a large estate in Penza province, worth between twenty-five and thirty thousand rubles.

ership positions in any of Ishutin's political organizations.¹⁸

One of the first enterprises to get under way was a bookbinding artel begun by Dmitry Ivanov, also from Ishutin's hometown of Penza but some six years younger. Ivanov and several friends arrived in Moscow in the fall of 1864 with fifty rubles for capital and *What Is To Be Done?* as a handbook; Ishutin soon moved in on this promising project, at first by providing the artel with most of its business. In addition to the gentry student founders, the artel involved four "workers," who stuck with the enterprise until Ivanov was arrested in 1866, but it was never a success either financially or as a venture in "consciousness-raising." Speaking of his attempts to indoctrinate the workers, Ivanov told the court that later tried him (his remarks must therefore be treated with some caution), "We sometimes spoke to these workers about cooperative principles, but they absolutely wouldn't listen to us and could not imagine life without a boss."¹⁹ It would be fascinating to know more about Ivanov's collision with the boss mentality of the four workers, but this scrap of testimony is unfortunately all that we have. We also know very little about the artel's finances, except that it needed periodic inputs of capital from Ishutin.

Altogether a more substantial operation was the cooperative of seamstresses started up by Ivanov's two sisters, Ekaterina and Aleksandra. Ekaterina, the more restless and innovative of the two, arrived in Moscow in November 1864, apparently attracted by what her brother wrote of his experience with the artel of bookbinders. One of her letters to her sister in Nizhny Novgorod gives us a first-rate feeling for the sensibility of a woman radical of the 1860s at the time she was actually making the break with her family and previous circumstances. It was impossible, she wrote, for a woman in Russia to earn an "honest piece of bread" with society constituted as it was.

Is it possible [she continued] that you call honest bread [what is earned by] governesses and teachers in general, who preach to children what they themselves do not believe, or accustom children to lie, advising them not to express before their parents those ideas

which they discuss? Or, perhaps, is it honest to live on a little accumulated capital?²⁰

Stimulated by her brother's experience, Ekaterina Ivanova came to see the organization of a cooperative as something she could do to change the consciousness of her contemporaries while ensuring herself that "honest piece of bread." She evidently did not know that the capital for her artel of seamstresses was put up by Ishutin: something on the order of two or three hundred rubles was needed to buy sewing machines, furniture, and such things. By the time Aleksandra arrived in Moscow in the fall of 1865, the artel was composed of ten people, a mix of working-class women, whom Ekaterina hoped to educate and "reform" (as Vera Pavlovna had in *What Is To Be Done?*), and women from the educated upper class; of those who became active in radical politics, all were from the upper-class group, however. The Zasulich sisters were to become famous in the annals of Russian radicalism and feminism; two of them were involved in the artel; a third, Vera, was to become a heroine of the Left by shooting the governor-general of St. Petersburg in 1878 for having a prisoner flogged. She was subsequently acquitted by a jury and escaped abroad, where she became a founding member of the first notable group of Russian Marxists in the 1880s.

An incomplete charter of the artel suggests the ideals of its members—or at least those of the Ivanova sisters.²¹ An "elder" was to be elected by the entire membership to serve a one-year term, although she could be voted out of office if her performance was deemed unsatisfactory. All incoming members had to be approved by the entire group, and they were supposed to bring in ten rubles for capital; should they decide to leave, their investment would be returned to them. Should a member become sick, the artel would support her for three weeks in the hospital; a member who needed hospitalization for longer than three weeks would have to leave the artel. After all expenses had been taken care of, the remaining proceeds would be divided equally. There was a common dormitory bedroom, and meals were eaten together.

But, as with the bookbinding venture, things did not work out according to the model provided by Vera Pavlovna's artel in *What Is To Be Done?* The central problem, as might be expected, was lack of capital. Because they had to buy them in small quantities, materials cost more. One sewing machine was not enough, and the cooperative could not afford a second. As the prices charged by the artel were well below those of ordinary dressmakers, there was plenty of work, but despite the long hours put in by the Ivanova sisters and at least some other members, they barely made enough to pay for food and the rent for their apartment.

It is not surprising that there was considerable turnover in personnel; for this reason, apparently, the "elder" was never elected and the Ivanova sisters provided continuing direction. On occasion, too, they seem to have provided some members with spending money out of their own pockets; in addition, Ishutin and Iurasov contributed additional sums, probably in excess of one hundred fifty rubles. By 1866, the artel's financial position seems to have become truly desperate; a further contribution of one hundred rubles from Ishutin and his friends was judged insufficient to keep it going.

The Ivanova sisters also provided a weekly round of reading and lectures, most of which took place on Sundays. Here again the inspiration was *What Is To Be Done?* After a week of extremely hard work, the members would gather on Sunday to discuss (or be lectured on) popular works of materialism, in particular the *Physiologische Briefe* of Karl Vogt, physiology and geography, as well as novels and essays by Herzen and Chernyshevsky. There was also a smattering of Russian and European literature: Turgenev, Gogol, Goncharov, and Dickens. It would be interesting to know how the working-class women responded to these educational Sundays.

As we have seen, the *Ishutintsy* provided most of the capital for the artel. In addition, many meetings of both groups took place on the premises, at which particular stress was laid on the political role of women in the revolutionary struggle. Personal relations were also close: Osip Motkov, a member of Ishutin's

circle, and Aleksandra Ivanova were living together, and the intelligentsia members of the artel were well aware of Ishutin's activities.

The most ambitious of Ishutin's other projects was the attempt to create an iron-smelting factory on cooperative principles in Kaluga province, on land adjoining the properties of one of Russia's largest landholders and factory owners, whose peasants were in a state of discontent over his ruthless management of his many enterprises. But this plan never got off the ground. The *Ishutintsy* were also involved in a second artel of seamstresses; they tried to set up a quilting factory near Mozhaisk; an economic failure, it lasted only a few months.

One of the most interesting and characteristic of the circle's activities was the creation in 1865 of a free school for working-class boys in Moscow, known as the Musatovsky School after its moderate "front man," P. A. Musatovsky, an aristocrat from Vladimir who was a Populist fellow traveler. "We will make revolutionaries out of these little boys," said Ishutin in an oft-quoted remark, and indeed the curriculum was calculated to do just that. Dmitry Iurasov, a twenty-three-year-old dropout from the juridical faculty of the University of Moscow, was the arithmetic teacher, and the following may be considered typical of his teaching methods. Seventy-two million is greater than one, he told his class, and so the seventy-two million people of Russia should have the power that accrued to the one Tsar. Pëtr Ermolov taught natural history; on one occasion he described the eagle as a bird of prey, devouring weak creatures like rabbits; for this reason, he told his class, it was chosen as the symbol of Russian imperial power.²² The school was closed down after a few months because Ishutin wished to devote its resources to the iron-smelting factory, to the creation of which much of the group's energy was devoted that summer.

Ishutin never stopped trying to realize the program of artels and co-ops sketched out in *What Is To Be Done?* until his organization was destroyed in 1866. Nevertheless, a new spirit began to be discernible among the *Ishutintsy* toward the end of 1865, a spirit we might call revolutionary impatience. Although Ishutin

had increased his group's membership and connections among student and other radicals, none of their attempts to set up cooperatives had really succeeded, and their efforts to reach either urban working people or peasants had also failed. As the magnitude and difficulty of the task of building a new society became unmistakably clear, the search for a shortcut became psychologically more and more enticing.

One kind of activity helped the *Ishutintsy* to believe that they were making a real contribution to "the cause": the liberation of political prisoners. Their only real success came in the case of the Polish revolutionary Yaroslav Dombrowski, who was arrested for his part in the Polish rebellion of late 1864; a few days later he escaped, disguised as a woman. Iurasov hid him for several days in his apartment; later a false passport was made for him, and early in the new year he succeeded in escaping abroad.²³ Then, early in the summer of 1865, Ishutin was informed that N. A. Serno-Solovëvich, at thirty-one a veteran of a decade of radical organizing and pamphleteering, would be passing through Moscow on his way to Siberia. Despite a good deal of discussion, no concrete plan was made on this occasion, and nothing was done. But the episode inspired an elaborate plan to liberate Chernyshevsky—only one of many that were to be hatched over the next fifteen years. (Given his prestige among Russian revolutionaries, it is hardly surprising that group after group was drawn to the notion of freeing him, generally with the idea that he should be set up as a journalist somewhere outside of Russia. To younger radicals who had not known him, his identity was already merging with that of his "mythic" creation, Rakhmetov.) In this instance, Ermolov donated several thousand rubles, and several false passports were procured; conversations took place between the *Ishutintsy*, St. Petersburg sympathizers, several Polish revolutionaries, and various other people. The project was still pending in the spring of 1866.

But Ishutin in particular was sick of talk; propaganda and organization were all very well, but a revolutionary deed was necessary; on one occasion he said to Zagibalov, "All of what we are doing is beside the point; in my opinion—paf, paf" (which seems

best translated as “bang, bang”).²⁴ Here we have the first, rather primitive expression of an idea that would periodically recur among the Populists, even after the failure of 1881: that the assassination of the Emperor, perhaps together with that of other high government officials, could provide the spark that would ignite the hitherto apathetic peasantry into revolution. This idea was always most attractive in times when discouragement with the *narod* was greatest; in periods of optimism, it tended to recede. In Franco Venturi's words,

if we follow the strand of revolutionary movements from *Zemlya i Volya* [Land and Liberty] onwards, we are inevitably led to conclude that the pistol shot becomes an exact substitute for . . . [an] appeal to the Tsar (or, after appeal had been proved useless, for the false manifesto used by the Polish revolutionaries to incite the peasants along the Volga). It was when these attempts had failed that the idea of assassination began to take first place. It was both an act of extreme lack of confidence in the State and a confession that the revolutionaries themselves were too immature to replace it with an organization of their own.²⁵

The growing interest in regicide coincided with the development of a more extreme psychology and the flowering of the tendencies toward Machiavellianism and mystification that had previously been perceptible within the group.* One also senses for the first time a kind of pessimism, as if Ishutin and his friends felt they might not be around for long and should do something “for the people” on their way out.

*Dmitry Ivanov, in his testimony before the government's Commission of Inquiry, noted Ishutin's love of secrecy and mystery, his tendency to speak dramatically of mysterious persons and meetings and to imply the existence of vast, secret organizations with which he was in touch. See E. S. Vilenskaia, *Revoliutsionnoe podpol'e v Rossii (60-e gody XIX v)* (Moscow, 1965), pp. 225-26.